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For Immediate Release
April 15, 2004

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Sen. Brown's agriculture tourism legislation approved by Senate committee

LANSING – State Sen. Cameron S. Brown, R-Fawn River Township, testified yesterday before the Senate Committee on Agriculture in support of his legislation designed to promote economic growth in the state's rural areas.

"When you cross tourism with agriculture you get a hybrid called agritourism," Brown said. "One of the prime examples is Nottawa Fruit Farm. Don and Eleanor Iott are shining examples of creating a value-added agriculture enterprise. They've taken agriculture and married it to tourism in the best way possible. When we look at ways to enhance the economy of our rural communities, this value-added aspect of agriculture is the product we want to enhance."

Senate Bill 225, introduced by Brown, is part of the Rural Economy package that is focused on promoting rural economic growth.

Created by SB 225, the commission would undertake studies regarding the effects of local zoning on agricultural tourism, model local zoning ordinance provisions to promote agricultural tourism and submit a report to the governor and legislative committees.

As proposed by Brown, the member commission would be made up of three individuals representing agricultural tourism enterprises, two individuals representing local government, an individual from Travel Michigan Division of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and an individual representing the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA). All appointments would be made by the MDA director.

"We are gratified that Senate Bill 225 recognizes that the existence and implementation of land ordinances and zoning regulations can actually be a deterrent to agricultural tourism," said Eleanor Iott of Nottawa Fruit Farm. "The bill also signals that tourism is an integral part of the agricultural community."

Annually, Michigan's agriculture adds \$37 billion to the state's economy, making it the state's second-largest industry.

SB 225 was approved by the Senate Committee on Agriculture and will now go before the full Senate for a vote.

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